

Why Should We be Concerned about Youth Gambling?

If they're not drinking or using drugs, what's the big deal?

Gambling is not a safe alternative to alcohol or drug use. Many people think that poker among friends is totally safe if young people are not drinking or smoking. The truth is, while most people do not develop problems with gambling, more youth than ever are developing problems with gambling. Consequences of problem gambling include more than lost money. Our youth are the first generation in our nation to experience the current acceptability and accessibility of gambling. Their mothers and grandmothers are taking trips to local casinos; families watch poker tournaments on TV as if they were a sporting event and schools regularly have casino nights as fund raisers or after proms and graduation. We owe it to our youth to teach them that gambling is not risk free.

Large-scale prevalence studies and reviews all confirm the high prevalence rates of youth gambling. It is estimated that between 4% and 8% of adolescents presently exhibit a serious gambling problem with another 10% to 14% of adolescents at risk for developing or returning to a serious gambling problem (Shaffer & Hall, Meta Analysis, 1996, Journal of Gambling Studies, 12, 193-214)

Gambling risk behavior is consistently associated with other risky behavior such as drug use, juvenile delinquency and family problems:

Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Study, 2003 www.nebraskaprevention.gov/pdf/NRPFSS03statereport.pdf

- Of the students who gamble, the most common age of initiation is 10 or younger
- Males are more than twice as likely as females to have gambled in the past year
- Males are three times more likely to respond to two or more "problem gambling" questions than females
- Gambling involvement is positively correlated with substance abuse and all other risk factors for substance use

Teen problem gamblers have higher rates of:

Crime (theft, robbery, embezzlement)

School problems (e.g., lower grades, truancy, behavior issues)

Family problems (e.g., withdrawal, behavior issues)

Peer relationship problems

Legal and money troubles

Depression; suicidal thoughts and attempts

Dissociative, "escape" behaviors

Risk for co-occurring addiction(s) including alcohol and substance abuse

*Source: Gupta and Derevensky, eGambling Youth Gambling: A Clinical and Research Perspective
<http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue2/feature/> .*

**For free confidential information and referral
regarding a gambling problem, call
1.800.NEXT.STEP (1.800.639.8783) or
www.problemgambling.az.gov**